

从安娜的自我成长看《金色笔记》中的苏菲主义自我观

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从安娜的自我成长

看《金色笔记》中的苏菲主义自我观

The Sufi View of the Self in *The Golden Notebook*:

An Analysis of Anna's Self-Growth

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## Abstract

Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize Winner for Literature in 2007, is regarded as the most enduring writer in the history of British literature who has always been writing out of her intense experience, unique perception and spirit of the times. As a humanist, Lessing devotes herself to exploring the development of individuals and the betterment of the society and is largely illuminated by the non-western philosophical and religious works through extensive reading. In the 1960s, she had the first contact with Sufism which largely resembles her own ideas. The study of the Sufi thoughts endows her with a new mode of thinking which makes her discover the narrowness of the western worldview and ideologies and scrutinize the self and the world in a new way. Her masterpiece *The Golden Notebook*, though written before her official turn to Sufism, is acknowledged as her most Sufi book.

This thesis attempts to explore the issue of the self in the novel in the context of Sufism. Firstly, the thesis examines the origin and spread of Sufism, the way of the Sufi, as well as the connection between Sufism and Lessing's literary creation, which lays the philosophical foundation for the following study. Secondly, it analyzes how the female protagonist Anna, in face of chaos and conflicts, goes through three evolving stages towards self-perfection, including the dissolution, the exploration and the unification of the self. Through the examination of Anna's self-growth towards perfection, this thesis reveals the Sufi ideas contained in the novel, and further explores Lessing's Sufi view of the self.

**Key Words:** self; growth; Sufism; perfection

## 摘要

2007 年诺贝尔文学奖得主多丽丝·莱辛被誉为“英国文坛的常青树”，一直以来根据自己强烈的体验、独特的感知力以及时代精神进行创作。作为一名人文主义者，莱辛致力于对个体自我发展和社会改良的思考和探索，并通过广泛的涉猎从东方的哲学和宗教著作中得到了许多启发。20 世纪 60 年代初，莱辛第一次接触苏菲主义，便与其产生了巨大的思想共鸣。苏菲哲学赋予了她新的思维方式，促使她发现并摒弃了西方主流意识形态中狭隘的世界观，以更广阔和包容的视野审视自我与世界。虽然《金色笔记》写于莱辛正式转向苏菲主义之前，但她本人曾表示，这是其最富有苏菲主义色彩的突破之作。

本论文试图结合苏菲主义哲学挖掘小说中的自我主题。首先，论文介绍了苏菲主义的历史背景和主要思想，以及苏菲主义与莱辛创作的关系，为下文的分析提供了思想基础。其次，论文具体分析了女主人公安娜如何在混乱和冲突之中探寻自我完善的三个苏菲式的成长阶段，即自我消解、自我探索及自我统一。通过审视安娜走向完善的自我成长历程，本论文揭示了小说所蕴含的苏菲之道，并进一步探究了莱辛的苏菲主义自我观。

**关键词：**自我 成长 苏菲主义 完善

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## Introduction

Doris Lessing has long been regarded as one of the most popular, productive and prominent writers of the postwar generation. Since the publication of her first novel *The Grass Is Singing*, she has produced a series of outstanding works such as *The Golden Notebook*, *The Four-Gated City*, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* which are held in high esteem by a heterogeneous readership worldwide. Lessing's writings encompass a wide range of concerns, from the political and social issues such as racism, communism and colonialism to the psychological dimensions and the mystical methods of thought. But in spite of the varied subjects and techniques in her literary experiments, the principal concern in most of her novels is the question of finding the right path for the existential equilibrium within the individual and also between the individual and the society (Fahim 1). This motif, in consequence, endows her writings with a strong humanistic spirit, "with skepticism, fire and visionary power" that "has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny" (qtd. in Chen, *The Reading Instructions* 116).

Lessing was born in 1919 in Kermanshah, Persia into a middle-class British family that had emigrated from the postwar Britain. At the age of six, due to her father's job transferring, she moved with the whole family to South Rhodesia where she grew up under a multi-cultural background and lived for the following 25 years. There she spent a number of days and nights walking along the open veld and appreciating the scenery, animals and plants in the natural countryside, an experience that gave her plenty of pleasure and cultivated in her an open and independent mind. However, it is also in South Rhodesia that Lessing had witnessed the big gap between the colonizer and the colonized as well as the brutal racial discrimination. Although her family always suffered financial struggles and resource shortage, their life would still "represent untold luxury to the native Rhodesians" employed by her parents

(Knapp 4). In addition to the unequal living conditions, she also discovered that there was a deeply rooted and commonly seen “white colonialist mentality,” which she criticized as uncivilized, hypocritical and oppressive. In her eyes, such a mentality of superiority results in great unfairness but it is only part of a larger picture of inequity (qtd. in Newquist 19). With an ambition of making a difference in the world, she took up her pens, trying to express her indignation and criticism in her stories.

It is fortunate that the multi-cultural experience in South Rhodesia provides Lessing with abundant writing sources. After quitting her job in a lawyer’s office, she made up the decision of becoming a professional novelist and thereafter began the first period of her writing career from 1950 to 1962. Strongly believing at that time that the highest point of literature was the works of the moral realists produced in the nineteenth century, Lessing started her career with the intention of reflecting the social circumstances and the “climate of ethical judgment” (qtd. in Bigsby 77). *The Grass Is Singing*, her first novel which centers on a white woman’s tragedy caused by colonialism and racial discrimination, is immediately well-received among the general public after its publication in 1950. Besides, Lessing produces the first three volumes of *Children of Violence* and several collections of short stories, which make her the winner of many literary prizes. As Lessing once says in an interview, “the important part of writing is living. You have to live in such a way that your writing emerges from it” (qtd. in Newquist 14). Based on her life experience, Lessing adopts the style of realism to describe the real circumstances in central Africa. Moreover, under the influence of her literary models such as Tolstoy and Flaubert, her works tend to be radical and political in this stage, which often reveal the social problems and show her indignation and protest against the unfairness that happened on the continent.

In 1949, Lessing left Africa and took up residence in England. For her, England is a paradise to pursue her career of writing. In face of the fact that everything was changing and the standards of values were turned upside down, she gradually realized that it was not enough to just write about a local society, a very local, temporary set of

social circumstances—“What’s true in a society isn’t true in another. What’s true for one time isn’t true five years later” (qtd. in Bigby 78). Attempting to transcend herself, she not only made efforts to widen and deepen the themes of her stories, but she made innovations in term of the artistic techniques. In 1962, Lessing’s masterpiece *The Golden Notebook* came out, which initiated the second stage as well as the golden period of her writing career. From then on, Lessing pays more and more attention to the connection between art and philosophy. She strives to achieve a harmonious interaction between the theme and the structure of a novel so that all the meanings would be manifest through the form. Unlike her early novels and short stories that concern the characters’ experience and its association with the outside world, the focus of her writings in this period such as *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *The Summer before the Dark*, *The Memoir of a Survivor* is shifted to the spiritual realm of human beings. These works are thus classified as the novels of “inner space,” which explore how people perceive themselves and how people tackle spiritual crisis and inner fragmentation in the divided modern civilization.

After the exploration of inner space, Lessing headed to another brand-new area to exploit more possibilities and potentialities in the form of writing. This is the third stage of her writing career, in which she made impressive achievements in science fiction. Early in 1969, she published *The Four-Gated City*, a prophetic novel with strong sci-fi flavor, which could be seen as a preparation for her later attempts in this style. Within a short period of four years, that is, from 1979 to 1983, Lessing produced five volumes of space fiction known as the *Canopus Sequence*, including *Shikasta*, *The Marriage between Zones Three, Four and Five*, *The Sirian Experiments*, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, *The Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire*. However, it seems that Lessing does not want to accept the science-fiction label given by the general public or even critics. For her, they are not “science” but fantasies or utopias. So instead, she is more willing to call them outer-space fictions which echo the inner ones. According to her, “inner space and outer space [are]

reflections of each other. I don't see them as in oppositions... [they are] connected" (qtd. in Hazelton). In the *Canopus* series, everything is derived from realistic lives, only told with a cosmic vision and as allegories and myths. Though writing from a different perspective and in an experimental form, Lessing continues to reveal the severe problems and crisis in the contemporary society and expresses her worries about the future of humankind.

Lessing returns to her early style of writing after 1983. Since then, she has published many realistic novels such as *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, *The Good Terrorist*, *The Fifth Child*, and *Love, Again*. Her writings in this phase become more concise and down to earth and therefore easier to read.

Throughout her productive and long-lasting writing career, Lessing has been exploiting in herself the artistic potentialities all the time so as to maintain the vitality and creativity in her works. Besides, she has always been a humanist who shows deep concerns about the existence of human beings and the development of human civilization. Not only does she call for people's attention to their inner world and their striving for self-perfection, but she advocates the enhancement of their connections with the rest of the universe. For her, the sense of "we," of the universe, can emerge only as a result of "the exploration of the self, of the awareness of the identity of the self" (Marchino 260). Moreover, she keeps on emphasizing the responsibility and function of writers all over the world—"we have functions...The job of writers, if they take their profession seriously, [is] to place their fingers on the wounds of our times" (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 109). She wants to be a healer of souls, hoping that, with her writings, people may survive the fragmented world by shifting their mode of thinking and enlarging the dimension of their perceptions of themselves and the world.

Among Lessing's literary works, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is generally regarded as her most remarkable achievement, which is created within a year and marks the second stage of her writing career when she was at the watershed of turning

to the inner-space writings that concentrate on human psychology and self-consciousness. “[Its] excitement is,” according to Stephen Gray, “that it always seems to be created as one reads it” (191). In other words, it has been a living thing over the centuries. The novel was produced at a time when the postwar British society was undergoing a tremendously critical transition from the old to the new, which had a great impact upon people’s lives. As Lessing recalls, “then everything and my life was changing and so...it expressed itself in that book” (qtd. in Gray 119). To be more specific, in the political aspect, with the successive independence of its ex-colonies after WWII, the British Empire gradually lost its imperial dominance over the world and was challenged by the increasing power of the United States. The Cold War between the two hegemonies, together with turbulent circumstances around the world caused by conflicting events such as the Hungarian incident and the Vietnam War, largely intensified people’s fear of the outburst of potential wars and violence. In the ideological aspect, people started to doubt authorities and conventions due to the death of Stalin, the holding of the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the anti-psychiatry movement. And in the aspect of literary creation, the limitations of the realistic writing to reflect reality became more and more obvious, calling for the adoption of a new form that can be in accord with the turbulent society as well as the mental crisis of human beings.

As a result, Lessing was helplessly at a loss and in urgent need of advice and guidance when writing the novel since it was about the experience she had never had. She had tried to examine herself and reflect upon what was happening in her life and the world, but was faced with many things that cannot be explained in the context of western ideologies (Torrents 66). Standing on the stance of a Marxist or a progressive, she discovered that it “stripped away the whole texture of ideas, remarks, and themes” (qtd. in Montremy 195). For her, the worldview and values promoted by the western society turned out to be absolutely inadequate (qtd. in Bigsby 84). So she looked for satisfying answers to her confusions through an immense amount of reading. It is in

the extensive readings of the non-western classical works that this British female writer came to discover that “the western education was extremely lacking information”—“You could be brought up in this culture and not know anything at all about the idea of other cultures. We are brought up with this appalling western arrogance...it seems to me almost impossible not to have this arrogance if you are brought up inside the Western education system (qtd. in Bigsby 85). In postcolonial criticism, it is due to this “western arrogance” that western values and thoughts are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism, which marginalizes or excludes the non-western traditions and forms of cultural expressions (Selden 218-219). Thanks to what Lessing has witnessed since childhood in the colonized regions and her lack of western education during the years, she is not westernized and does not internalize the typical colonialist arrogance that could blind her to everything from the non-western world. Instead, a post-colonialist mentality is cultivated in her mind, which enables her to look at the world from a different perspective. Discovering the value of non-western thoughts which are not found in the Western mainstream philosophy, she learns to think out of the box and perceive things with a more extensive and holistic vision. Among the valuable non-western thoughts, Sufism seems to be the most significant one that has been showing her a way out of confusions and towards illuminations since her first encounter with it in the 1960s. For Lessing, the thoughts in Sufism happen to be what she was looking for. In a 1982 letter to Mona Knapp, Lessing mentioned the unexpected resonance between her ideas and the Sufi philosophy: “I became interested in the Sufi way of thought because I was already thinking like that, before I heard of Sufis or Sufism.” Moreover, she has frankly admitted that her most Sufi book is *The Golden Notebook*, written before she had ever heard of mysticism (qtd. in Knapp 13).

The Sufi elements in *The Golden Notebook*, however, are not given enough attention when we go through the research on the novel. Perhaps due to the feminist movement prevailing in the 1960s, the novel, as soon as it was published, was

“instantly belittled...as being about the sex war, or was claimed by women as a useful weapon in the sex war” and Lessing was proclaimed as the Saint Joan of Women’s Lib (Lessing xii). Susan Lardner worships the book as “a feminist gospel” that brings many women to feminism (qtd. in Wang 4). Margaret Drabble regards it as a landmark masterpiece in the history of Women’s Liberation (qtd. in Galye 17). Claire Sprague believes that Lessing, as a feminist pioneer, not only subverts the traditional perception that women must satisfy men, but sarcastically challenges man’s abilities (qtd. in Wang 4). Moreover, there was even a time when Lessing was, in reverse, ridiculously accused as a notorious despiser of women. As Lessing complains, “Misunderstandings swarmed around the book” at that time (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 108). These early responses not only underestimate the exploding theme and the aesthetic values of the novel, but also go against Lessing’s original purpose of writing—“I wasn’t writing a treatise on feminine stereotypes of the ‘60s. To the very end, I wanted to tell a story which neither political positions nor sociological analyses were capable of exhausting” (qtd. in Montremy 193). No wonder, Lessing expresses her great disappointment at the critics’ narrow-mindedness: “I’m impatient with people who emphasize the sexual revolution. I say we should all go to bed, shut up about the sexual liberation, and go on with the important matters” (qtd. in Raskin 175).

While the themes were frequently misinterpreted, the special design of the novel’s construction was also overlooked or depreciated in the 1960s. As Joseph Hynes observes, few critics published essays on the structure of that book “though what has appeared indicates the need for such analysis” (100). Fredrick P.W. McDowell, failing to appreciate the value of the experimental narrative that unites form and content, makes an abrupt and highly subjective judgment that the novel is “courageous but disorganized; more ideological than aesthetically formed” (qtd. in Hynes 100). Likewise, Dorothy Brewster, the author of the first critical biography of Doris Lessing, points out that the various thematic questions raised by the book, though effective sometimes, are not much taken with its construction (qtd. in Hynes



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